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HINTS

FOR THE

SCIENTIFIC OBSERVATION
AND STUDY

OF

CHILDREN.

BY

MRS. HELEN ADLER.

NEW YORK:

THE TEACHER CO.,

51 EAST 9th STREET.

1891

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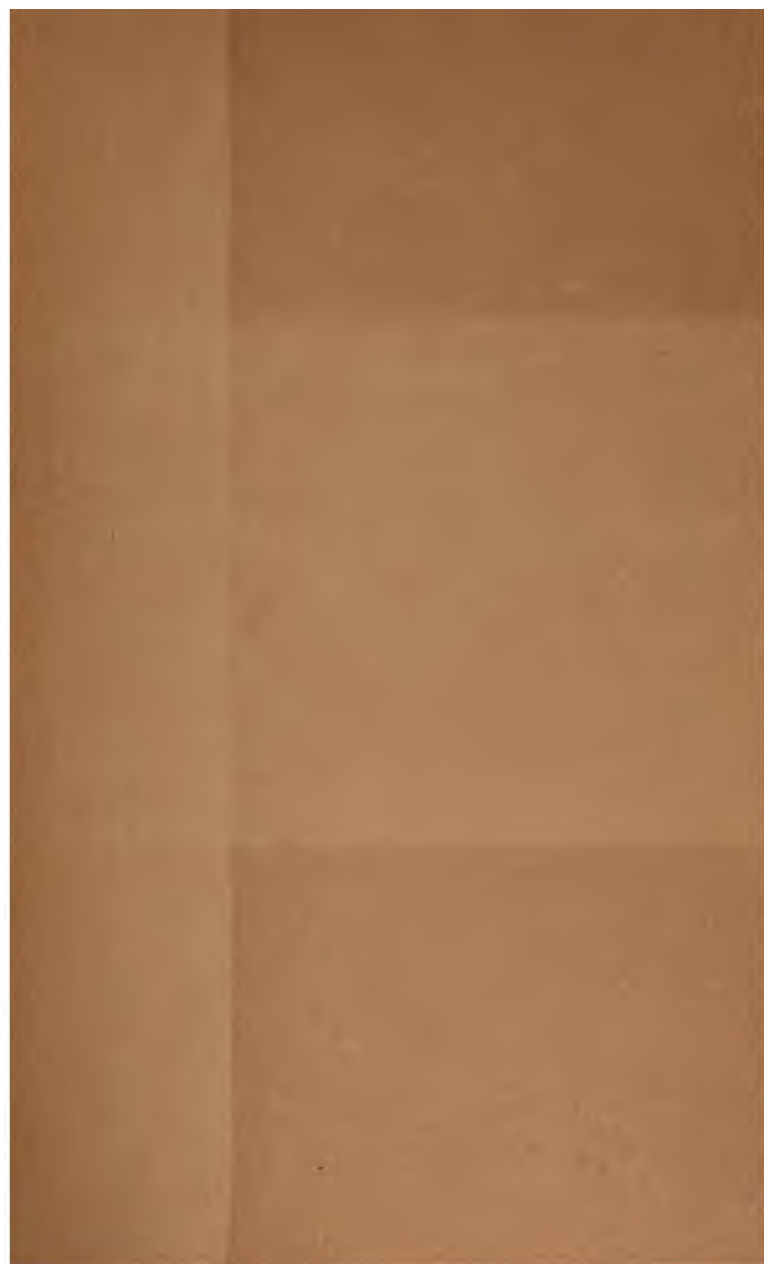
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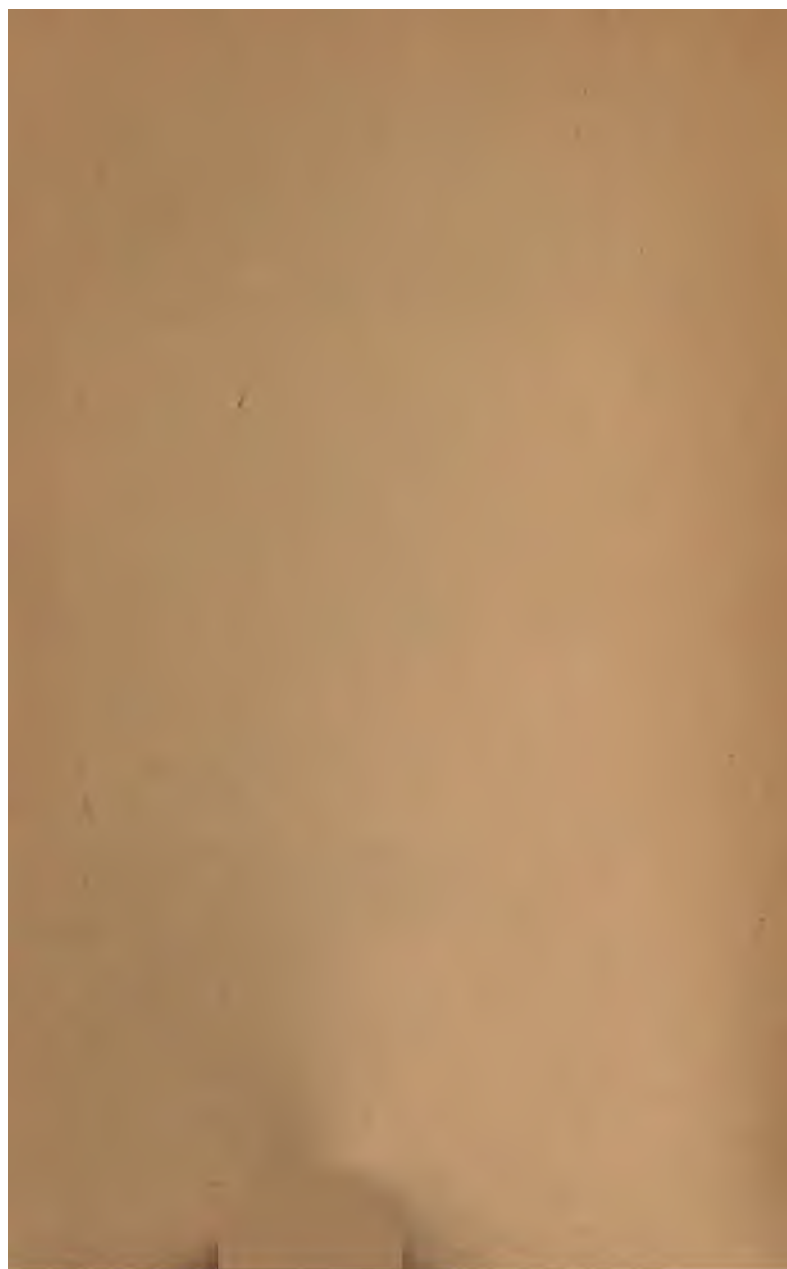
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SCIENTIFIC OBSERVATION AND STUDY OF CHILDREN.

THE importance of Journals for the careful study and record of the development of Children is universally recognized at this day. Pedagogues and psychologists unite in stimulating the efforts of those who engage in this work, the results of which are expected to be of far-reaching influence in the departments of psychology and anthropology, as well as in the applied sciences to which these serve as guides. "It is probable, indeed," says Sully, "that inquiries into the beginnings of human culture, the origin of language, of primitive ideas and institutions, might derive much more help than they have yet done from a close scrutiny of the events of childhood." When we consider that but very little of scientific value is known concerning the unfolding of the child's faculties, that only a few exact observations are on record of the development of language, and still less material is at hand concerning the growth of the moral perceptions, of conscience, of the feelings, of the sense of personality, etc., we can readily appreciate the need and the value of such records.

Preyer's book, "The Mind of the Child," which may be considered as marking a new epoch in the observation of children, Perez's picturesque, but less scientific sketches of child-life, the observations of Sully, Darwin, Taine, and others, the original

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researches of President G. Stanley Hall—all these serve to make us realize in some measure the possibilities of systematic and painstaking observation—the scientific study of familiar phenomena in child-life.

But strange to say, the note has been struck and still the instrument does not vibrate. After such notes of appeal the mother's heart should respond with a glad sound. She should feel that her opportunity has come, that her love and her intellect might unite in accomplishing the work that science calls for and that lies at her threshold. But the question at once arises—are mothers capable of doing this work, are any but the exceptional ones to be found who are sufficiently prepared for such a task? Preyer mentions with hearty appreciation his wife's co-operation and assistance in the work of observation, while Sully says: "The thought naturally occurs that the mother is the person specially marked out by nature for this honorable task. She will grudge no effort spent in divining the direction of those first obscure baby impulses, the form of that first unfamiliar baby thought; but has she the other qualifications—the mind severe in its insistence on plain ungarnished fact, trained in minute and accurate observation, and in sober, methodical interpretation? Here our doubts begin to rise. Few mothers, one suspects, could be trusted to report in a perfectly cold-blooded scientific way on the facts of infant consciousness. The very excellences of maternity seem, in a measure, to be an obstacle to a rigorous scientific scrutiny of babyhood." But is this destined to be an irremediable impediment? Can mothers not learn to overcome this

obstacle in their way? Cannot the "excellences of maternity" be made to work for good in this direction, as they do in many others? Pedagogues, too, have told mothers that maternal love is a stumbling-block in the way of severe and rigid discipline, that the mother's heart is too tender and yielding. Are there, therefore, no conscientious mothers who are able to exact implicit obedience? Cannot the mother be both loving and impartial? The general tendency does not exclude the possibility of a more intelligent attitude.

Though not inclined to underestimate the difficulties of the task, I would not consider them insurmountable. I believe that when mothers have once discovered the beneficent influence of a new method, there are numbers of intelligent women throughout the land, who will be able to school themselves to the doing of an ideal purpose.

Can the mother understand and appreciate the needs of the child's physical nature—this no one will deny; but must the development of the mental and moral life escape her observation?

The mother's devotion is unfailing, almost an infinite power; it needs only to be directed to the proper channels, so that it may work for the highest interests of the child. Instead of complete absorption in the child's desires, its play, its physical care, its relations to the external world, let the mother try to forego some of these not absolutely essential claims—the gain in time and energy to be utilized for a closer study of the internal life of the child, to which the mother is often a stranger, its moral development, its motives, its ideas on many subjects, its prejudices, its

errors and mistakes. Can she not critically study the child as well as love it, analyze its first crude attempts as well as admire them? A word here as to the method of observation. Mothers must first of all learn to appreciate the value of true scientific observation, must train themselves to observe correctly, methodically. They must humbly learn that their own powers of appreciation are worthless without the strict selection of valuable facts, the subordination of what is interesting and delightful to them to the universally interesting and profitable.

In the introduction to the American edition of Prof. Preyer's book, Dr. Harris says: "Method converts unprofitable experience, wherein nothing abides but vague and uncertain surmise, into science."

Method, strict, logical method, is the first desideratum; then vigilant observation, veracity, discrimination and ingenuity in the study of the child. Baby ways are charming and irresistible; they will be no less so when an attempt is made to discover the order of progress that dwells in them. Dearer yet will be the first faltering steps, the first lisped words, if the mother has been trained to keep careful note of how and when they were first attempted, how improved by exercise, how slowly and painstakingly perfected. The development of language alone offers a fascinating field of observation—to keep note of all the strange, obsolete sounds that bubble over on baby lips, the first imitation of words, the first understanding of words, the inventions of the child, all these the key to help in reading the soul within.

The baby will that holds the household in subjection will be no less potent, but perhaps more wisely

directed, if it is remembered how it was evolved by infinitely small steps of gradation from the first unconscious movements of the helpless babe.

The psychic life of the child, that mystery of mysteries, will seem somewhat nearer to us, the growth of its faculties a little more clearly revealed if we trace the record of their development day by day. These revelations are so brief, so evanescent, we need to make them permanent, to materialize them, as it were, before they escape us.

Our record is truly a necessity for preserving our knowledge of the child's psychical no less than of its physical life. The book of life has so many pages—daily a new record of interesting psychic impressions is traced so that the earlier pages, if not preserved, soon grow faint and blurred in memory.

When the early days of life are over the Journal need not cease. The record of elementary progress will give way to a study of more complex phenomena, the growth of mind, the building up of character. A mental portrait will be preserved that can serve as an indication later as to the tastes and talents that should be cultivated in school life, the gaps to be filled, the tendencies to be repressed—it can even point the way to a choice of profession. The opportunity for a study of the child in its social relations is given that may not recur, as with the advance of years the boy or girl is drawn away from the exclusive society of home, to the companionship that it craves. The child, too, can assist by its own contributions,—its first writing, its letters, school compositions, descriptions, etc.,—whatever serves to illustrate character or throw a light on disposition.

It is a task of years, and its interest never declines. The rewards may never come that have been looked for, the development of the child may not reach the ideal standard, but the work has been its own reward, and out of it must grow a fuller understanding of the child's individuality.

The habit of close and careful observation to which the mother has been trained, the scientific scrutiny of familiar phenomena, the knowledge that law reigns in the development of the child's faculties—all this cannot fail to react beneficially on the mother's method of training her child. Breaking away from the fetters of circumstance and caprice that heretofore controlled her, she will endeavor to follow more closely the leadings of Nature. When she recognizes the importance of sense training, she will not leave the early development of the child to the rule of chance or ignorance; by analyzing the intellectual needs of the young mind, she will also learn to supply them more intelligently and systematically; and when she considers the early development of the will-power, she will endeavor to control the environment and the habits of the child's moral life, so that all its influence may work in the direction of obedience to law, and the development of what is highest and best in the child's nature. In all, therefore, that relates to the physical, the mental, the moral welfare of the child, it is evident that the mother's training in observation and her record of the child's development will be a power for good, will result in increased influence and in truer education.

PLAN FOR A JOURNAL.

This plan or suggestions for the keeping of a Journal

is destined to be of service to those who are at a loss as to the method of classification. The plan is based on the method of Preyer, though not employing strictly scientific phraseology. The greatest difficulty of the work, how to begin observation and how to classify phenomena is overcome, and observation itself is stimulated by the tabulation of the material.

FIRST PERIOD.—UP TO THE AGE OF THREE.

First development of the senses.

I. Sight. First perception of light and dark.

First observation of objects.

First observation of color. (Observe carefully development of color sense.)

Movements of the eyes—of eyelids—co-ordination of movements of eyes.

Seeing near and distant objects. At what distance does the child observe objects and recognize?

Interest in bright objects, in moving objects, in strangers, in animals, new impressions, in friends. (Recognizing mother, father, nurse.)

When does it correctly appreciate my motions, such as—smiling at it, frowning, shaking head?

When does it understand objects, such as—bottles of milk, bread, crackers, etc.

Interest in minute objects—on the floor small crumbs, pins, buttons, etc.

Interest in toys, picture-books, objects in the room, looking out of window.

Interest in objects that disappear, are taken away, drop on the floor, etc.

Interest in pictures—picture-books—dolls—first understanding of pictures, recognition of photographs, of reflection in mirror.

II. Hearing. First evidence of sense of hearing.

Notice of loud and sudden noises, fear of loud and unusual sounds—turning head in sound-direction, pleasure in sounds, in music, etc. (Thunder, strange voices, sounds of animals, musical instruments, listening to watch.)

At what age does it stop crying when spoken to, sung to, when it hears music or sudden noises?

III. Taste Development. Preferences as to foods. Taking medicine, etc.

IV. Smell. When first developed, sensitiveness to odors?

V. Touch. Sensitiveness to blows or painful impressions in different parts of the body, to touch, to temperature. (Bathing, cold water, cold air.)

VI. Tactual Perception. When does it grasp objects? (When does it control power of grasping, or reaching objects, of picking up objects?)

VII. Sense of Pleasure. What produces it? What sounds give evidence of it? What words describe it later?

VIII. Sense of Pain. What produces it? What sounds give evidence of it? What words describe it later?

IX. Hunger. What sounds evidence it? By what sounds does it denote it?

X. Sense of Fatigue. What produces it? What sounds give evidence? Habits in regard to sleep—is it wakened easily by noises?

XI. Fear. How produced, how evidenced by child, fear of falling, of strangers, unusual sights and sounds, fear of animals, thunder.

XII. Astonishment. How caused, how denoted?

DEVELOPMENT OF THE WILL.

Motions of the child as evidence of Will Power.

I. First Motions. Stretching, moving head, arms, legs, eyes, sudden motions when startled. Peculiarities and development.

II. Instinctive Motions. Grasping with the hands, holding adult's finger. (Gradual development of this act.) Sucking, biting, chewing. Hold-up the head. (Slow and difficult accomplishment for child.)

Learning to sit alone.

“ “ creep and move about alone.

“ “ stand and to get up.

“ “ walk.

“ “ stoop, to step up or over something, to hop, to dance, to run, to climb.

III. Imitative Motions. Coughing, blowing, screaming, shaking head, shrugging shoulders, kissing, combing its hair, wiping its nose, reading, writing, bowing and all other motions purely imitative, such as giving to others of food, playing hide-and-seek, slapping and pulling hair of adults, etc. Pleasure produced by such imitations.

IV. Expressive Motions. Smiling (the first smile unconscious), conscious laughing, kissing, screaming (with or without tears), frowning,

shaking head, nodding, pointing to objects, etc., etc.

DEVELOPMENT OF MIND.

What Emotions expressed without Language—by changes in Voice and Expression?

Before Language. Development of memory. (Remembering objects, etc.)

Any acts showing mental activity. Power of association (denoted by the recognition of objects when their names are mentioned). Power of reasoning. (Acts showing reasoning power, obeying of commands—do this, give me this; also other acts showing mental power, such as pushing a chair to reach an object, opening door to look out, hiding an object when asked for it.)

DEVELOPMENT OF LANGUAGE.

First sounds, first vowels and consonants. What new ones in each month? Which sounds first produced, later left unused?

First Imitation of sounds, conscious or unconscious. (Imitation of sounds of animals, of sounds of machines, domestic appliances, etc.)

First words used to designate persons or objects.

First syllables used, *first combinations* of two words, *combination of words into sentences.* (First judgment pronounced by child.)

First invented words—(Baby language). Words or sounds to denote child's interests.

ORDER OF PARTS OF SPEECH.

Imitation of words used by adult—adaptations or combinations of its own.

Words coined by child without imitation of others, its own use of words imitative of others without understanding their meaning. Mistakes in pronunciation and imitation. Counting.

First question asked by child—use of pronouns—use of verbs.

First repetition of songs by the child.

First story related by the child.

Questions asked by the child—(first interrogative word—where?)

Independent reasoning expressed by language—Several concepts denoted by one prominent characteristic, such as—(all white liquids are milk).

Use of "I."

Use of "please."

Compound Words.

Understanding of time—yesterday—to morrow.

First question why?

(Vocabulary at the age of two years.)

(" " " " " three years.)

MISCELLANEOUS.

Special affection for persons.

Fond of what toys?

Jealousy—evinced how?

Temper—anger—strong will?

Obedience.

Behavior to other children—brothers and sisters.

Love of approbation.

Obstinacy—how does it endeavor to gain its point?

Power of attention.

Judgment and reasoning.

Hallucinations and errors of judgment.

Vanity—Love of clothes, etc.

Self consciousness.

Constructive and destructive instincts.

Play—manner of, imagination in play.

Moral sense, how far developed—how evinced?

AFTER THE AGE OF THREE.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT.

Health, strength, ability to endure fatigue and exertions.

Weight, height.

What exercise, food, sleep, and other habits?

Muscular development, proficiency in games and sports.

Of dainty and delicate habits, easily satisfied, or indifferent.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE SENSES.

Sight—Keeness, etc., observation correct or vague.

Hearing—Delicacy, susceptibility to noises, sudden sounds, etc.

Sense of Smell—Delicacy, sensitiveness to disagreeable odors.

Sense of Touch—Delicacy, development of tactual perceptions.

Sense of Taste—Delicacy.

MENTAL DEVELOPMENT.

Memory—Learns easily, retains well, forgets.

Power of Reasoning—Logical power, clearness of thought and expression.

Power of Association—Evinced in study and pastimes.

Power of Observation.

Application—Perseverance.

Facility in manual work.

Facility in speech and use of language.

Conception of time, of number, of the external world, of space, of natural phenomena.

SPECIAL TASTES AND TALENTS.

Love of pictures, music, colors, natural scenery.

What stories please it? Can it tell a story well?

What games and occupations please most?

What books please most?

Does it show analytical faculty in appreciating its pleasures?

Is it fond of study, does it realize the value of knowledge?

MORAL DEVELOPMENT.

Disposition per se.

Strong or weak will—self-control.

Timid or self-assertive.

Bashful, manly.

Truthful, or deceitful—Nature of its falsehoods (due to fear, love of gain or exuberant imagination).

Active or lazy, dawdling, quick or slow.

Greedy, grasping or generous.

Vain or indifferent to personal appearance.

Development of conscience.

Obstinacy. Due to mental incapacity or to sensitive temperament.

DISPOSITION TOWARDS OTHERS.

Social or unsocial—a leader in games.

Selfish or unselfish—kind to smaller children or disposed to tyranny.

Chivalrous to opposite sex—devoted to mother or father.

Behavior to inferiors—servants—animals.

TEMPERAMENT.

Imaginative or lacking in imagination.

Practical or unpractical.

Fond of being alone or needs society.

Original or imitative.

Merry and happy, or moody and sullen.

Desirous of approval of others or indifferent.

Independent or dependent in its judgments and thinking.

Emotional or unemotional.

Æsthetic sentiment. (Has it good taste?)

Has it great respect for authority?

Is it versatile or limited to a few qualities?

Is it neat and orderly, or disorderly and untidy?

Is it awkward or graceful?

Is it thorough or superficial?

Special Questions.

Does it ask religious questions (who makes things, etc.), the whys and wherefores?

What talent leads—has it any scientific or literary bent?

What most salient trait in character?

What ambition—To be what? To do what?

What heroes has it?

What is its idea of a good man?

What is its idea of a good time?

How does he regard girls, or she regard boys?

Has it any conception of money?

Can it make things?

Is it right or left handed?

What hereditary traits?

Interest in death?

Interest in questions relative to sex?

Has it good instincts in regard to companions?

Does it show great curiosity (scientific spirit)?

Has it sense of humor—fond of punning?

Has it any prejudices or aversions?

Is it capable of deep attachment to persons and places?

Fear of the dark and belief in the supernatural (Santa Claus, etc.)?

What dreams does it have?

Has it dramatic talent—in telling stories, rehearsing past events, etc.?





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